UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

PROVISIONAL

E/1994/SR.36
12 December 1994

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Substantive session of 1994

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 36th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 18 July 1994, at 3 p.m.

President : Mr. BUTLER (Australia)

later: Mr. BOTEZ (Romania)
(Vice-President)

CONTENTS

Economic and environmental questions: Reports of subsidiary bodies, conferences and related questions

(a) Sustainable development

Corrections to this record should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, Office of Conference Services, room DC2-794, 2 United Nations Plaza.

The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS: REPORTS OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES, CONFERENCES AND RELATED QUESTIONS (continued)

(a) SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (E/1994/33, 43, 47 and 108)

Mr. TÖPFER (Germany), speaking as Chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development, introduced the report of the Commission on its session (E/1994/33), pointing out that, as noted in Chapter II, paragraph 7, the overall financing of Agenda 21 and sustainable development had fallen significantly short of expectations and requirements. The Commission had reiterated the need for increased efforts to implement all the financial commitments made in Rio at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, including the need to bring official development assistance levels in line with the 0.7 per cent target, as reaffirmed in Agenda 21, as soon as possible. In that connection, the Commission was considering the imposition of emission charges. It would also be useful to develop a matrix of policy options and financial instruments and mechanisms to facilitate the formulation of optional financing strategies for the sectors.

Additional efforts were also essential in the area of the transfer of environmentally sound technologies, cooperation and capacity-building, and priority attention would be given to access to and dissemination of reliable information on environmentally sound technologies, institutional development and capacity-building, and financial and partnership arrangements between countries and between the private and public sectors.

Considerable progress had been made in the area of trade and environment by working towards closer cooperation between the Commission, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the World Trade Organization (WTO) and by strengthening the role of the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the United Nations Development Programme. With the successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round, efforts needed to be made to ensure that all developing countries benefited from trade liberalization as well as better terms of trade. It was equally important to make trade and environment policies mutually supportive.

(Mr. Töpfer, Germany)

The Commission had reaffirmed the need to change these patterns of which consumption and production were detrimental to sustainable development. It had also agreed that developed countries should take the lead by adapting effective measures for change in their own countries (chap. I, para. 43).

Concerning specific sectoral issues, a request had been made to develop the prior-informed-consent procedure into a legally binding instrument. Moreover, a vigorous request had been made to ban the export of domestically prohibited chemicals from countries that were members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development to other countries. The Commission had also recommended that the Economic and Social Council should invite the Committee on Natural Resources to address the question of freshwater as part of the comprehensive assessment at its third session in 1996. Concerning forests and the possible clash with the land use issue, he would initiate, in consultation with the Bureau, effective ways of enhancing coordination and complementarity in the preparatory work for the meeting of the Inter-sessional Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Sectoral Issues.

It was also important to develop realistic and understandable sustainable development indicators which could supplement national reporting and provide a useful tool to measure progress towards sustainable development and global partnership. The Commission must continue to expand its contacts with other bodies within and outside the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions and WTO. The Commission had stressed the importance of involving all major groups in the process of sustainable development, including non-governmental organizations. In that connection, he drew attention to the recommendation contained in Chapter I, paragraph 24 (b) of the report.

Mr. LAMANRA (Observer for Algeria), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that fresh and additional resources as well as the transfer of environmentally sound technology to developing countries were crucial to the implementation of sustainable development. In that connection, the mandate of the former working group on technology transfer must be incorporated into the mandates of the two inter-sessional working groups on finance and sectoral issues. The concept of shared but differentiated responsibility must be reflected in all relevant areas

(Mr. Lamanra, Algeria)

through practical measures that took into account the considerable constraints developing countries faced in their attempts to achieve economic, social, cultural and ecological recovery and development. The issues of trade and the environment should not be contemplated from a single perspective; it was important to ensure that they would not lead to disguised forms of protectionism to the detriment of developing countries and that the new Committee on Trade and the Environment, to be established under WTO, would work closely with UNCTAD and the Commission. As for consumption and production patterns they must be completely changed especially in the developed countries. Finally, the Group of 77 hoped that the International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, would come into force as early as possible.

Mr. HENZE (Germany), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the Commission must maintain the political momentum required to tackle major issues pertaining to sustainable development. While the language of the decisions could have been more specific, the results of the Commission's second session were broadly encouraging.

With respect to sectoral issues, in most cases specific markers would allow measurement of further progress. The general language in the relevant decisions, however, needed to be translated into action. The European Union welcomed the Commission's decision to review the results of its second session at its third session and strongly encouraged the Bureau to consult further on how such follow-up efforts could be carried out without overloading future sessions. The work accomplished on freshwater and toxic chemicals, for example, demonstrated the importance of adequate inter-sessional preparation for setting priorities and drawing up concrete action plans.

The European Union welcomed the more focused mandates for the Inter-sessional Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Groups on Finance and Sectoral Issues. However, it was essential to clarify how they would operate. Concerning the issues of changing consumption and production patterns, although the Commissions's recommendations needed to be made more specific, important principles had been established. For

(Mr. Henze, Germany)

example, it had been acknowledged that developed countries should take the lead by adopting effective measures for change, in their own countries and that all countries should benefit from establishing and maintaining more sustainable consumption and production patterns. The importance of internalizing environmental costs and using economic instruments, taking into account the approach that the polluter should, in principle, bear the cost of pollution, had also been reaffirmed, although a more forward-looking approach on the latter issue would be desirable. The European Union would contribute as concretely as possible to efforts to develop a work programme for sustainable consumption and production patterns.

It was crucial to ensure the maximum coordination and complementarity of the work programmes of the Commission, the World Trade Organization and other relevant forums, including UNCTAD and UNEP. The European Union was pleased that the Commission planned to review annually developments in the area of trade, development and environment; it also attached importance to the presentation of substantive replies to the Secretary-General on the issue of a study on the relationship between the protection of the environment, international competitiveness, job creation and development.

The exchange of national experiences in the implementation of Agenda 21 should be intensified in order to further enrich the discussion of sectoral and cross-sectoral issues. Parallel to the formal meetings of the Commission, interested countries might wish to meet to discuss how they were implementing Agenda 21. The establishment of national commissions on sustainable development in a number of countries was a welcome development, as were the initiatives taken to facilitate exchanges of experience. National reports were an important contribution to the work of the Commission and the simplified guidelines for their preparation would be valuable in highlighting progress achieved and problems encountered. Work on indicators for sustainable development should be accelerated. Initially, even preliminary versions of such indicators should be utilized in order to promote progress in that area.

Only if the Commission could agree on satisfactory reporting procedures would it be able to fulfil its important monitoring mandate and conduct continuous follow-up

(Mr. Henze, Germany)

leading to the overall review and appraisal of Agenda 21 in 1997. The bureau of the Commission should consult broadly on how to improve its work methods well before the third session. If members made their views known in advance in writing, there might not be any need for a general debate. Focused panel discussions or presentations by lead speakers were a useful way to open discussion on major issues on the Commission's agenda in 1995 and to encourage informal discussions among the ministers present. Depending on the themes chosen, it might be helpful to closely involve the business community and other major groups and to encourage broader participation at the political level. The sheer volume of decisions taken at the second session had placed a serious strain on negotiating capacities during the session. Options for decisions to be taken at the third session should be made available well in advance in order to allow enough time for consultations.

In view of the rowing importance of inter-sessional activities, the European Union believed that, in future, the Bureau should be elected early enough to enable it to provide adequate guidance to the preparatory process leading up to the Commission's sessions.

The bureau and the United Nations Secretariat had a vital role to play in ensuring effective inter-sessional preparation. Encouraging additional inter-sessional activities and enhancing coordination, where necessary, and integrating them into a coherent preparatory process, with the substantive involvement of experts and major groups and the enhanced participation of those responsible for development, planning and finance were essential for substantive preparation of the 1995 session. Non-governmental organizations could also make a substantive contribution.

The European Union encouraged transparency and an intensified exchange of views with regard to the High-level Advisory Board on Sustainable Development. The Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development had a crucial coordinating role to play, and Member States therefore should be offered timely and regular information on its activities. The European Union supported the proposals of the Chairman of the Commission on the conduct of inter-sessional activities, including those on forest issues.

Ms. WILLIAMS-MANIGAULT (United States of America) said that her delegation fully supported the results of the Commission's second session and urged their full implementation. There were five elements that it believed were crucial to strengthening the relevance and effectiveness of the Commission and enhancing the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

First, submission to the Commission of national information on the aspects of Agenda 21 scheduled for consideration at each session should be improved in terms of quantity (the number of countries submitting such information) and also qualify (timeliness, succinctness and ease of comparison with other countries' submissions). Her delegation also felt that the use of a set of environmental, social and economic indicators of sustainable development would simplify reporting and facilitate comparisons. The Chairman of the Commission had a mandate to identify and encourage the use of such a set of indicators and her delegation took note of his indication that he intended to do so.

Second, the preparation and use of national sustainable development strategies must be encouraged and facilitated. A central part of the working level segment at the Commission's next session could usefully be devoted to national experiences in developing and applying such strategies.

Third, coordination by the United Nations system for the implementation of Agenda 21 must be made more effective; as the agenda for development evolved, it should draw on Agenda 21 as a core element and incorporate recommendations from the major international conferences held in 1993. The reports by task managers of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) on various chapters on Agenda 21 should be compiled into a system-wide implementation strategy.

Fourth, the role of development assistance in implementing Agenda 21 deserved more attention, and fifth, inter-sessional activities must continue, in particular the work on forests. That work would be very significant in shaping perceptions of the Commission's value and usefulness; the Chairman's role would be critical in shaping that effort and he should receive unstinting support from the members of the Council and of the Commission.

(Ms. Williams-Manigault, USA)

The United States of America would focus its inter-sessional efforts on addressing threats to coral reefs and reducing human and environmental exposure to toxic substances.

Mr. TIANKAI (China) said that his delegation fully supported the statement made by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the Group of 77 regarding the future work of the Commission.

The Commission's primary task was to implement the agreements reached at the Rio Conference; fulfillment of those commitments would determine the success or failure of international cooperation on the environment and the credibility of the United Nations in that field. On questions of finance and the transfer of technology, little progress had been made, and in some areas there had even been regression. According to General Assembly resolution 47/191, the Commission's top priority was to monitor progress in the implementation of Agenda 21, including progress in the implementation of commitments, including those related to the provision of financial resources and transfer of technology. The Commission therefore needed to make greater efforts to carry out that work.

Pre-conference preparations in respect of issues considered by the Commission, especially cross-sectoral issues, must be improved. All those issues were very complex but in many cases there had not been sufficient research. It was not enough for the Commission to spend two weeks a year on such issues; full background data must be collected, and the documentation must be thoroughly prepared. A broad exchange of views was needed in order to lay a solid foundation for the Commission's work. Inter-sessional working groups had an important role to play. His delegation hoped that the inter-sessional Ad Hoc Working Group on Finance would be able to make real progress on the issue of the transfer of technology. The Commission's links with other bodies needed to be strengthened, since the issues it considered were closely related to issues considered in other bodies. The Commission should make full use of the research carried out by such bodies. At the same time, it should communicate the results of its work to other bodies of the United Nations system.

Finally, he noted that the Commission's report had been distributed very late and that the Chinese version was not yet available.

Mr. SHIBATA (Japan) said that the results of the Commission's second session were encouraging. At that session, his delegation had urged the Commission to strengthen its role as the central intergovernmental body responsible for translating the spirit of Rio into concrete action and had stressed the need for it to be given a high political profile. To that end, the Commission must not shrink from expressing its views on controversial issues.

His delegation attached great importance to the Commission's decisions on trade and the environment and, in particular, its call for closer collaboration with the World Trade Organization and other relevant international bodies. In that connection, he drew attention to the decision taken at the Marrakesh Ministerial Meeting to establish the Committee on Trade and Environment.

Mr. MONABE (Benin) said that his delegation's views coincided with those put forward by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the Group of 77.

Agenda 21 had been very eloquent on the question of financial resources and much had been said and written about the need to honour the commitments made. The Inter-sessional Ad Hoc Working Group on Finance had produced a report which had marked a regression from Agenda 21. The situation had been remedied somewhat at the Commission's second session but concerns remained because the provisions regarding new and additional resources to ensure sustainable development, especially in developing countries, were vague. His delegation called on the Commission to continue its efforts to achieve more concrete results. The same considerations applied to the question of the transfer of environmentally sound technologies for the benefit of developing countries.

His delegation supported the comments of the representative of Algeria on the crucial issues of trade and the environment and on WTO, but was concerned about the fate of developing countries, especially the least developed countries, since there could easily be a slide into a new protectionism. It called on the Commission to ensure that relations with WTO were open and transparent so as to avoid such dangers. It also appealed to States to sign the International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa and its original annexes so as to make it possible for the Convention to enter into force.

(Mr. Monabe, Benin)

His delegation supported the recommendations made by the Commission at its second session and the Chairman's efforts to improve its working methods. It hoped that the suggestions made by the representatives of Algeria and China would be given serious consideration.

Mr. LOZANO (Mexico) said that it was regrettable that the documentation on the item had not been received until the current meeting.

His delegation supported the results of the Commission's second session but felt that it would be premature to say that substantial progress had been made in relation to the agreements reached at Rio. It felt that, in addition to evaluating progress made in the implementation of Agenda 21, the Commission should study the difficulties which had arisen, and determine what international cooperation was needed, especially in financial matters and the transfer of technology, since the transfer of environmentally sound technologies was essential to promoting sustainable development.

His delegation agreed with other delegations that it was important to have consultations on how to improve the working methods of the Commission. It believed that the high-level segment should be held at the beginning of the Commission's session so as to provide significant input and that a format should be found that would allow time for a dialogue among ministers and a frank exchange of experience in implementing the commitments made in Agenda 21.

Mr. DOUJAK (Observer for Austria) said that his delegation fully endorsed the statement made on behalf of the European Union by the representative of Germany. The second session of the Commission had been very constructive. Further attention must be addressed to the question of changing consumption and production patterns in order to enhance understanding of the changes needed and the ways to effect them in a manner compatible with a market-oriented economy. The Commission must play a crucial role in encouraging the more efficient use of resources, particularly in developed countries.

All countries would profit from broader sharing of information on their experiences in implementing Agenda 21. His delegation welcomed the elaboration of

(Mr. Doujak, Austria)

more simplified guidelines to that end. In the long term, a way should be found to fully exploit useful data made available to the Commission.

Inter-sessional activities were a helpful contribution to the work of the Commission. For example, several recommendations by experts attending the International Symposium on Sustainable Development and International Law had been reflected in the Commission's recommendations on decision-making structures and trade, environment and sustainable development.

The Commission had again succeeded, through its high-level segment, in sustaining the political momentum generated at Rio. The issues involved required political commitments from Governments. His delegation hoped that over time, more ministers with portfolios other than the environment would be drawn into the process, thereby helping to further integrate environmental and developmental concerns.

Lastly, he agreed with speakers who had underscored the importance of adequate financing and of ensuring affordable access to environmentally sound technologies. Further efforts must be made to implement the decisions reached in Rio, and his delegation welcomed the inter-sessional activities planned in the coming months.

Mr. FLORENCIO (Brazil) said that his delegation believed that the Commission should be strengthened as a forum for the coordination of initiatives relating to the environment at the multilateral level. The financial resources which had been assembled so far in the field of the environment had been quite disappointing; the Chairman of the Commission, in his oral report, had drawn attention to the unsatisfactory level of funds devoted to the environment. The transfer of technology was essential in order to promote sustainable development; however, in that area, as in the area of financial flows, little progress had been made.

On the question of inter-sessional activities, his delegation stressed the importance of the existing working groups on finance and on sectoral issues to ensure balanced pattern in the Commission's work. Brazil's initiative to establish an inter-sessional working group had been approved at the Commission's second session; the objective was to maintain the momentum of the various initiatives, assure the coordinating role of the Commission and promote transparency. His

(Mr. Florencio, Brazil)

delegation felt that the inter-sessional working group should meet early in the second half of 1994 so as to safeguard that role.

His delegation felt that the treatment of the various issues relating to the environment should be approached in a balanced way and that no individual issue should be singled out as more relevant than others. Progress in one area without progress in another should be a cause for concern: there had to be an integrated approach to the environment.

While indicators were relevant to work in the area of the environment, it had to be borne in mind that if they were used prematurely without a rigorous methodology they could do more harm than good to the cause of sustainable development. They should not be used without a solid basis both in terms of the underlying methodology and in terms of the capacity for effective implementation.

Mr. PANKIN (Russian Federation) agreed with earlier speakers that it was vital to change the timetable of the Commission's work and that the Commission must interact with other United Nations and non-United Nations bodies and also with the Global Environment Facility.

Like many speakers before him, he also stressed the need for balance in the work of the Commission.

His delegation welcomed initiatives to help the least-developed countries and countries with economies in transition. It also supported the statement of Germany on behalf of the European Union. It was vital to rethink the dialogue concerning the implementation of Agenda 21. The reports presented to the Commission needed to be studied and analysed so that their priorities could be identified. He hoped a more rational work programme would soon be available.

Mr. CHYUN (Republic of Korea) requested that the United Nations agencies and international organizations should study the inter-relationship among national policy objectives such as trade liberalization, environmental protection, employment and economic development, and report its results to the Commission at its third session. His delegation felt that in the light of the abolition of the inter-sessional Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Technology Transfer and Cooperation, the Inter-sessional Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Finance and the newly established

(Mr. Chyun, Republic of Korea)

Inter-sessional Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Sectoral Issues must be certain to include the issue of technology transfer in their discussions.

Since developed countries contributed greatly to pollution and the depletion of scarce natural resources, they should set an example by changing their own patterns of consumption. They should report to the Commission at its next session on what policies and measures they had adopted to that end. His delegation supported the idea of a work programme for sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Mr. AMAZIANE (Observer for Morocco) said that while his delegation supported the work of the Commission at its second session, it regretted that greater attention had not been given to the issue of technology. He stressed the importance of discussing the role of politics in technology transfer.

His delegation associated itself with the declaration of the Chairman of the Group of 77 regarding the need for additional financial resources and the importance of technology transfer.

Regarding the best time for holding elections, he suggested that they could either be held at the end of each session, or else a one-day organizational session could take place in January every year for the purpose of electing the new bureau.

Regarding duplication between the general debate at the beginning of the Commission's session and the high-level ministerial meeting at the end, he felt that either the high-level meeting should be held at the beginning of the session, or the general debate should be redefined to encourage dialogue rather than speeches.

He praised those countries which intended to sponsor expert or intergovernmental meetings in preparation for the third session but stressed that it was important for developing countries to participate in those meetings.

Mr. BASMADJIEV (Bulgaria) said that the Commission on Sustainable Development was an important part of the follow-up process to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. It was important to identify concrete solutions to problems, particularly in the areas of financial resources, transfer of environmentally sound technology, and cross-sectoral issues. His delegation supported the inclusion of forests and biodiversity in the provisional agenda for the

(Mr. Basmadjiev, Bulgaria)

third session of the Commission and recognized the importance of involving other international organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations system.

As a country with an economy in transition, Bulgaria was attempting to achieve economic stability through sustainable development. It shared the view that national governments should promote policies aimed at utilizing all available resources and, as a country experiencing serious economic difficulties, it supported initiatives for debt relief.

Bulgaria recognized the importance of environmentally sound technologies and national capacity-building in the sphere of environmental protection. Like other countries with economies in transition, it was hampered by insufficient funding for research and development and by limited possibilities for purchase of high-technology products. There was an urgent need for wider access to such products on a concessional rather than a commercial basis through the use of grants and soft loans.

Mr. MARTYNENKO (Ukraine) said his delegation felt that the Commission should make broader use of its authority to coordinate in the field of sustainable development. More attention must be given to the problems of developing countries and countries in economic transition. If the international community did not move toward integration of sustainable development into the agenda of countries with economies in transition, greater problems might ensue. The desire of those countries to become integrated into the world community should be discussed at the third session of the Commission.

Mr. DESAI (Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development) said that the process initiated at the Rio Conference must be implemented at all levels, national, regional and global, and that the basic ideas of Agenda 21 must be included in the work of financial institutions and those involved in technology transfer. Initially, all agencies involved in the follow-up to the Rio Conference had given priority to intergovernmental and inter-agency activity, but it was time to pay more attention to national and regional action, financial institutions, and interaction between governmental and non-governmental organizations. The Secretariat was heartened by the continuing commitment of all countries to the success of the process initiated in Rio.

Ms. BEKELE (World Health Organization (WHO)) said that WHO had contributed substantially to the Inter-sessional Workshop on Health, the Environment and Sustainable Development held in Copenhagen in February 1994. A major recommendation of the Workshop, which had subsequently been confirmed by the Commission was the necessity of integrating health, environment and sustainable development goals and activities through innovative and holistic approaches. In connection with the lines of health reform recognized by the Commission (E/1994/33, para. 105), WHO, with support form UNDP, was working on an initiative to bring health and environment together in national planning for sustainable development. The first stage of the project involved eight countries, and others would be approached as new funds were mobilized. Initial results were encouraging but much work remained before it could truly be said that the spirit of Rio had generated progress with respect to health issues.

The five priority areas singled out in the Commission's decision on human health (E/1994/33, para. 108) provided a practical basis for progress within the policy framework established at Rio. Those five areas were already reflected in WHO's activities. WHO hoped that the Commission's decision would increase their priority and encourage the mobilization of additional funds. The decision of the Commission must also permeate other work of the Commission and, most important, the thinking of national authorities responsible for sustainable development.

During the Commission's second session, health had been discussed only as a sectoral theme. Although it was generally acknowledged that human health was intimately affected by cross-sectoral policies, there had been no real opportunity to explore how human health should be viewed as an element of all cross-sectoral areas. That was a matter of some concern to WHO.

Noting that the Commission had invited the World Health Assembly and other relevant intergovernmental bodies to take its recommendations fully into account, she said that the Assembly had endorsed the WHO Global Strategy for Health and Environment in May 1993 and could be expected fully to support the recommendations of the Commission.

Mr. VARCHAVER (Inter-Parliamentary Union) said that the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) fully supported the work of the Commission and had

(Mr. Varchaver)

entrusted its own Committee on the Environment to undertake a study annually on parliamentary action in the fields dealt with by the Commission and on the obstacles encountered by parliaments in that context. The first such study, conducted in May 1994, had shown that while parliaments were very aware of the outcome of the Rio Conference and various aspects of sustainable development, the work of the Commission was seldom if ever brought to their attention.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.